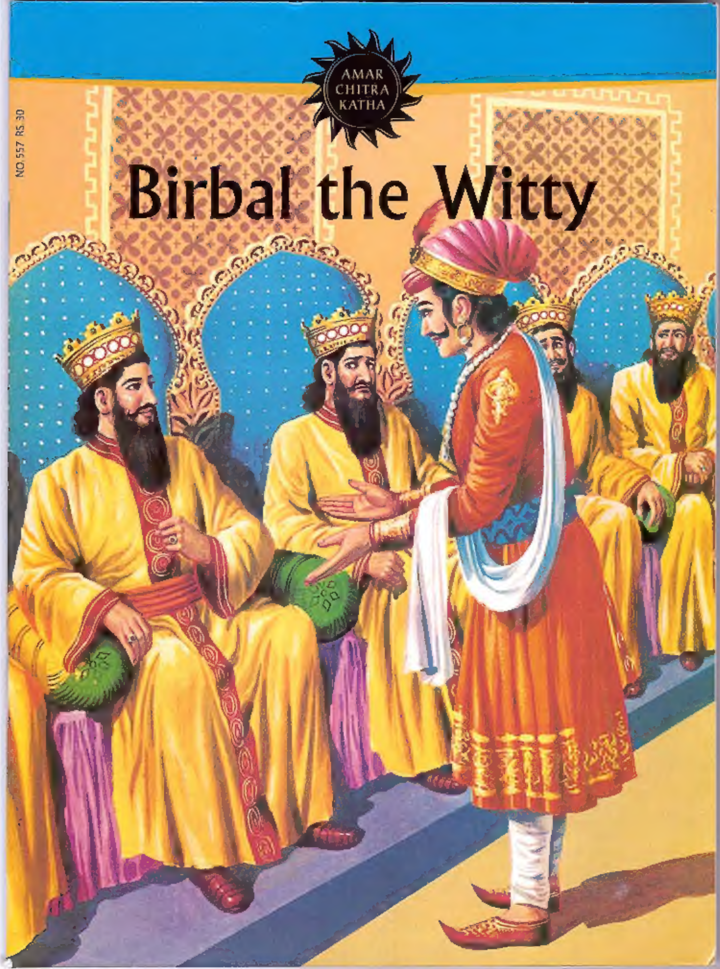

AMAR
CHITRA
KATHA
NO.557 RS 30
Birbal the Witty


THE TEN GREATEST FOOLS
AS THE EMPEROR, I MEET ONLY WISE AND LEARNED MEN, BIRBAL, NEVER A FOOL. SHOW ME THE TEN GREATEST FOOLS IN THE CITY.
AKBAR OFTEN ASKED BIRBAL TO DO THE STRANGEST OF THINGS, BUT THIS ONE BEAT THEM ALL.
I'LL GIVE YOU A MONTH TO FIND THEM.
IT SHOULD BE NO PROBLEM, JAHANPANAH. I MAY NOT NEED ALL THAT TIME.
AS BIRBAL WENT ABOUT THE CITY LOOKING FOR FOOLS, HE CAME UPON A STRANGE SIGHT.
WHY DO YOU CARRY THAT BUNDLE ON YOUR HEAD INSTEAD OF PLACING IT BEHIND YOU, ON THE SADDLE?


MY HORSE IS OLD AND FEEBLE, HUZUR* THIS WOOD MIGHT PROVE TOO HEAVY FOR HIM. HE MIGHT FALL DEAD! SO I'M CARRYING IT FOR HIM.
THERE CAN BE NO GREATER FOOL THAN THIS ONE!
COME WITH ME, MY MAN, AND YOU'LL NEVER HAVE TO CARRY ANOTHER BUNDLE IN YOUR LIFE.
AS THE TWO RODE ON, THEY SAW A MAN LYING FLAT ON HIS BACK WITH HIS ARMS IN THE AIR.
?
!

* SIR

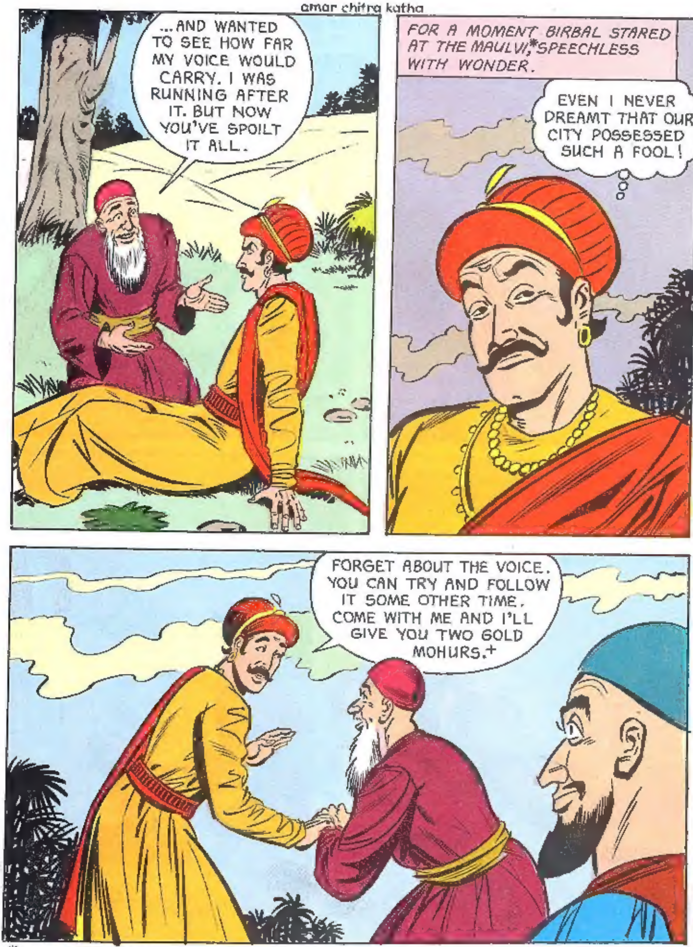

WHY, THAT MAN SEEMS TO HAVE HAD A STROKE! WAIT HERE WHILE I HELP HIM SIT UP.
NO! DON'T! PLEASE DON'T TOUCH MY HANDS!
I'M SORRY! DO THEY HURT?
NO! NO! NOT AT ALL! MY WIFE HAS ASKED ME TO BUY A POT AS BIG AS THIS.


IF I MOVE MY HANDS, I'LL GET THE WRONG SIZE; AND MY WIFE, A TERRIBLE SHREW, WILL SCOLD ME FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE.
WHAT A PRIZE FOOL! I MUST TAKE HIM WITH ME.


BIRBAL HELPED HIM UP, WITHOUT TOUCHING HIS ARMS.

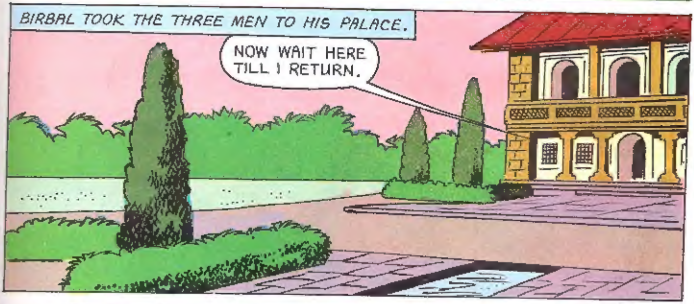

NOW DROP YOUR ARMS. IF YOU COME WITH ME, I'LL BUY YOU A BEAUTIFUL SET OF POTS; FROM THE SMALLEST TO THE LARGEST SIZE!


AND YOUR WIFE WILL BE SO PLEASED THAT SHE'LL NEVER AGAIN SCOLD YOU !
AS BIRBAL TURNED TO MOUNT HIS HORSE—
WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU ? CAN'T YOU SEE...
A THOUSAND PARDONS, HUZUR. I HAD JUST CALLED THE EVENING PRAYER FROM THAT MOSQUE...

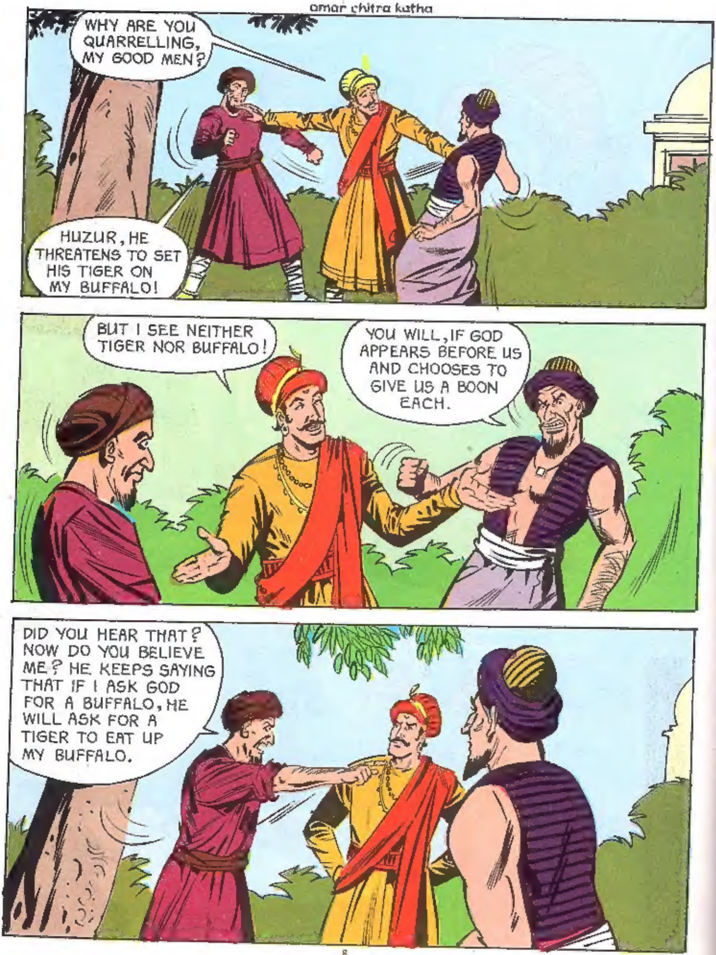


*MUSLIM PRIEST +COINS

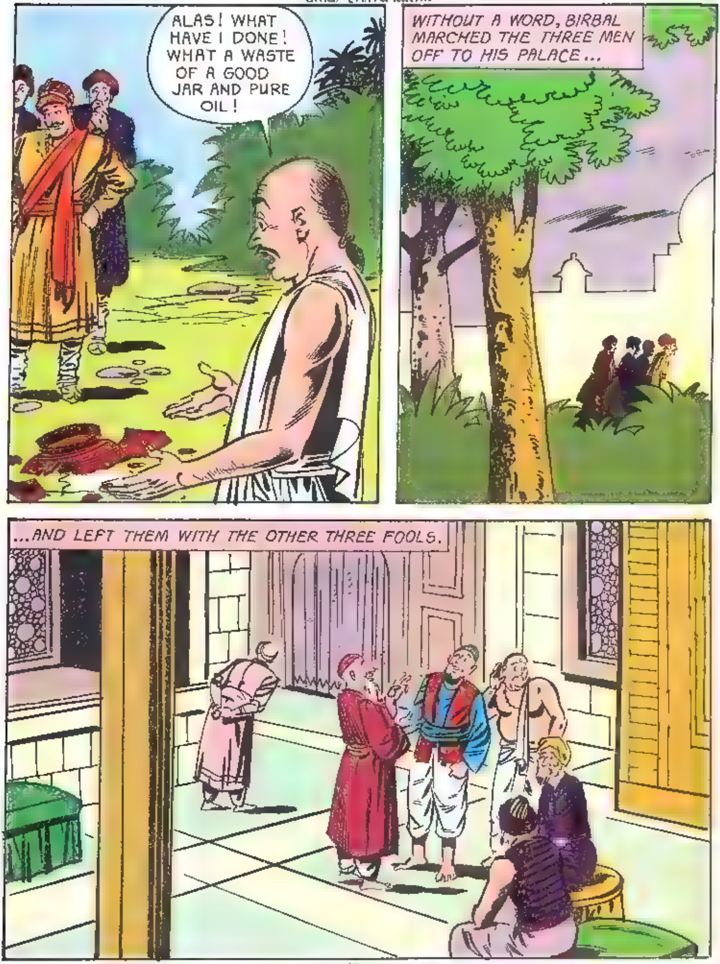

TWO GOLD MOHURS!
CERTAINLY, HUZUR, I'LL COME. HOW CAN A SLAVE DISOBEY HIS MASTER?

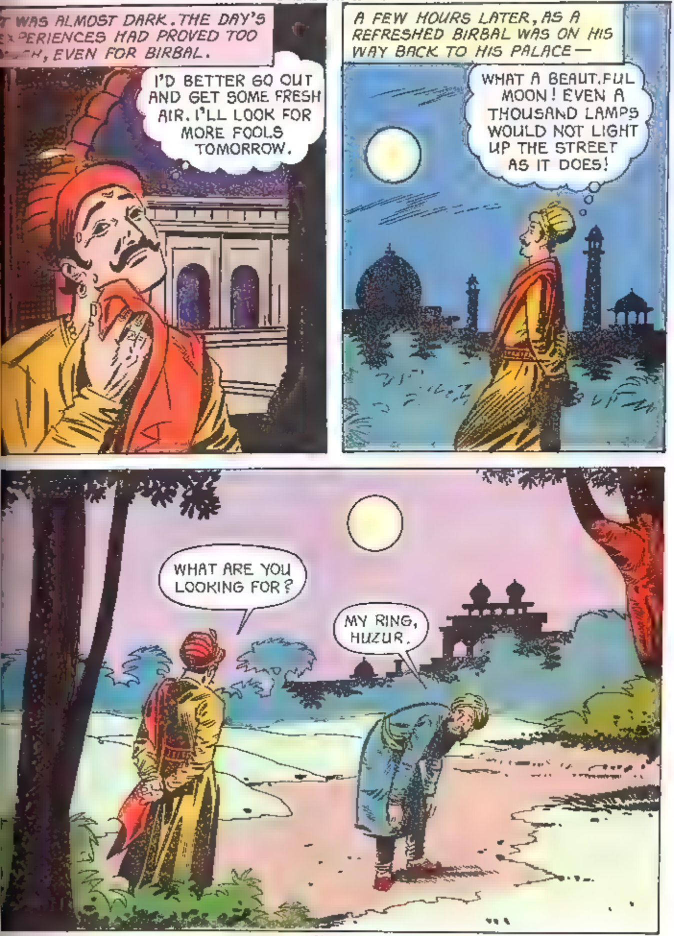

BIRBAL TOOK THE THREE MEN TO HIS PALACE.
NOW WAIT HERE TILL I RETURN.

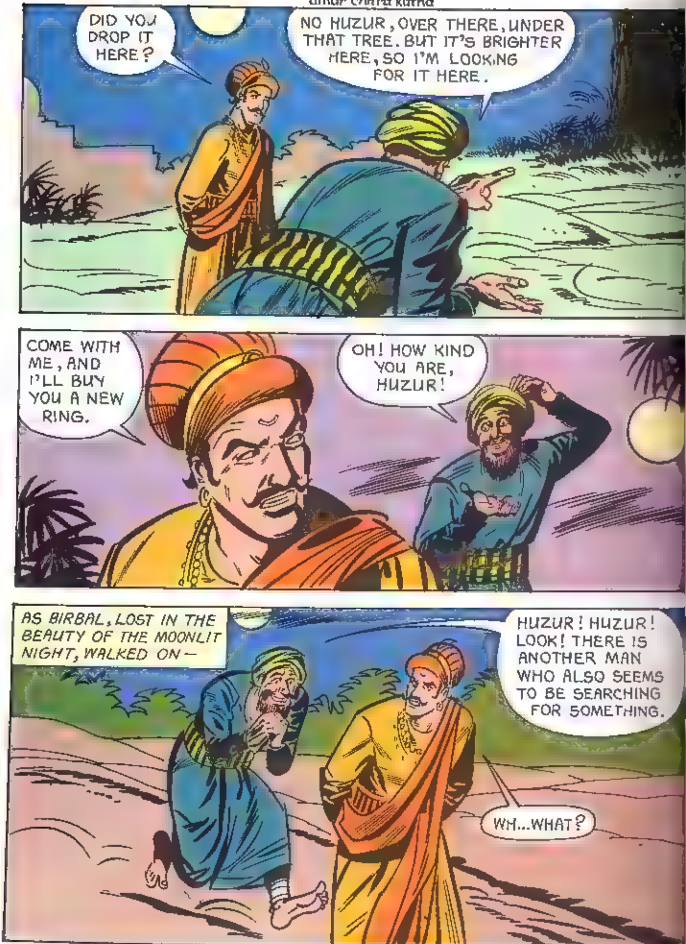

BIRBAL DID NOT HAVE TO GO FAR TO FIND MORE FOOLS.
WHAT ARE THOSE MEN UP TO?


WHY ARE YOU QUARRELLING, MY GOOD MEN?
HUZUR, HE THREATENS TO SET HIS TIGER ON MY BUFFALO!
BUT I SEE NEITHER TIGER NOR BUFFALO!
YOU WILL, IF GOD APPEARS BEFORE US AND CHOOSES TO GIVE US A BOON EACH.
DID YOU HEAR THAT? NOW DO YOU BELIEVE ME? HE KEEPS SAYING THAT IF I ASK GOD FOR A BUFFALO, HE WILL ASK FOR A TIGER TO EAT UP MY BUFFALO.

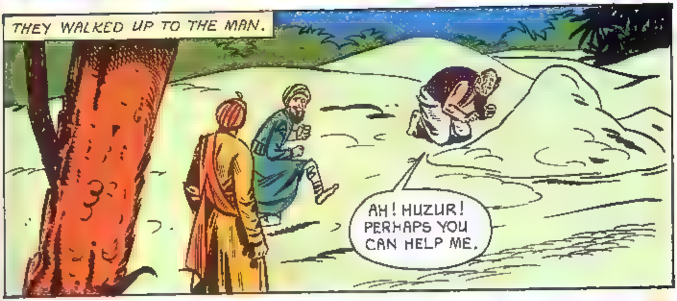

AND I WILL, TOO!
OH! WILL YOU? TAKE THAT AND THAT!
FOOLS! STOP IT! I SAY STOP IT!
HUZUR!
THE NEXT MOMENT, BIRBAL RECOVERED HIS COMPOSURE.
WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME?
WHAT A FOOL YOU ARE, HUZUR, TO TAKE THESE FOOLS SERIOUSLY!
IF YOU AREN'T, LET MY BONES BREAK TO BITS AND MY BLOOD RUN...
...LIKE THIS OIL!

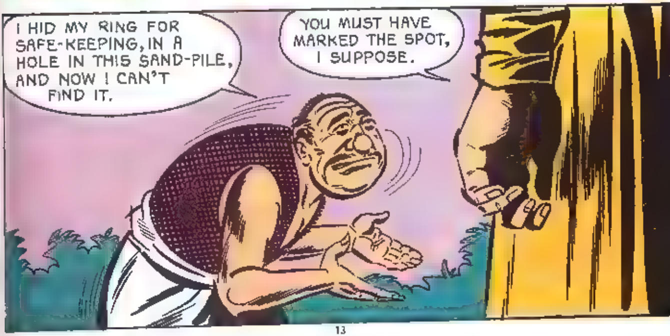

ALAS! WHAT HAVE I DONE! WHAT A WASTE OF A GOOD JAR AND PURE OIL!
WITHOUT A WORD, BIRBAL MARCHED THE THREE MEN OFF TO HIS PALACE...
...AND LEFT THEM WITH THE OTHER THREE FOOLS.

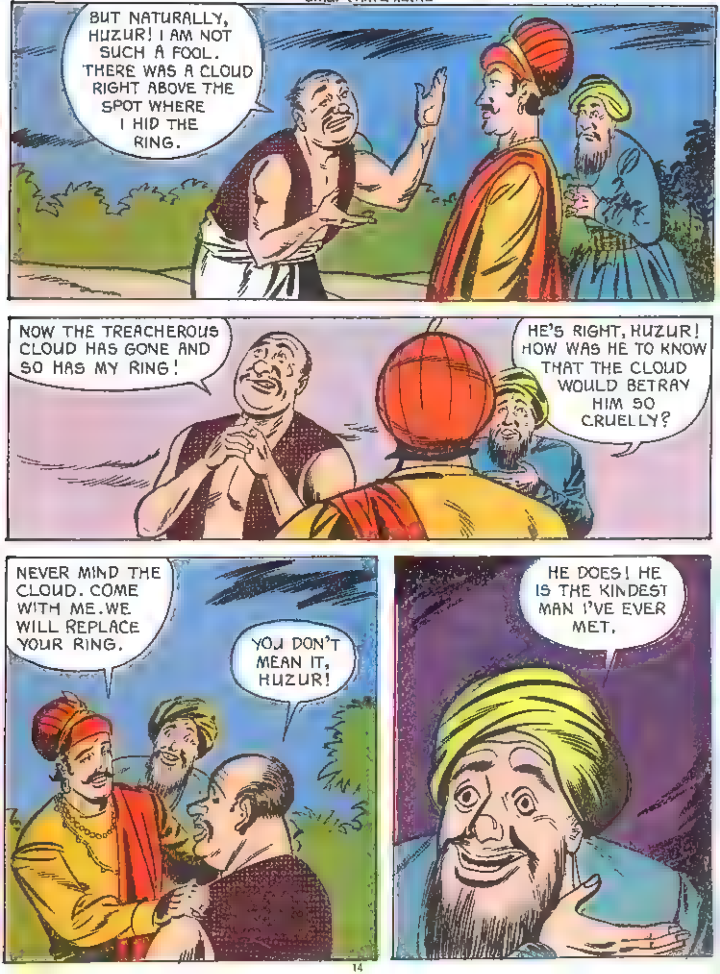

WAS ALMOST DARK. THE DAY'S
PERIENCES HAD PROVED TOO
, EVEN FOR BIRBAL.
I'D BETTER GO OUT AND GET SOME FRESH AIR. I'LL LOOK FOR MORE FOOLS TOMORROW.
A FEW HOURS LATER, AS A REFRESHED BIRBAL WAS ON HIS WAY BACK TO HIS PALACE—
WHAT A BEAUTIFUL MOON! EVEN A THOUSAND LAMPS WOULD NOT LIGHT UP THE STREET AS IT DOES!
WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?
MY RING, HUZUR.


DID YOU DROP IT HERE?
NO HUZUR, OVER THERE, UNDER THAT TREE. BUT IT'S BRIGHTER HERE, SO I'M LOOKING FOR IT HERE.
COME WITH ME, AND I'LL BUY YOU A NEW RING.
OH! HOW KIND YOU ARE, HUZUR!
AS BIRBAL, LOST IN THE BEAUTY OF THE MOONLIT NIGHT, WALKED ON—
HUZUR! HUZUR! LOOK! THERE IS ANOTHER MAN WHO ALSO SEEMS TO BE SEARCHING FOR SOMETHING.
WH...WHAT?

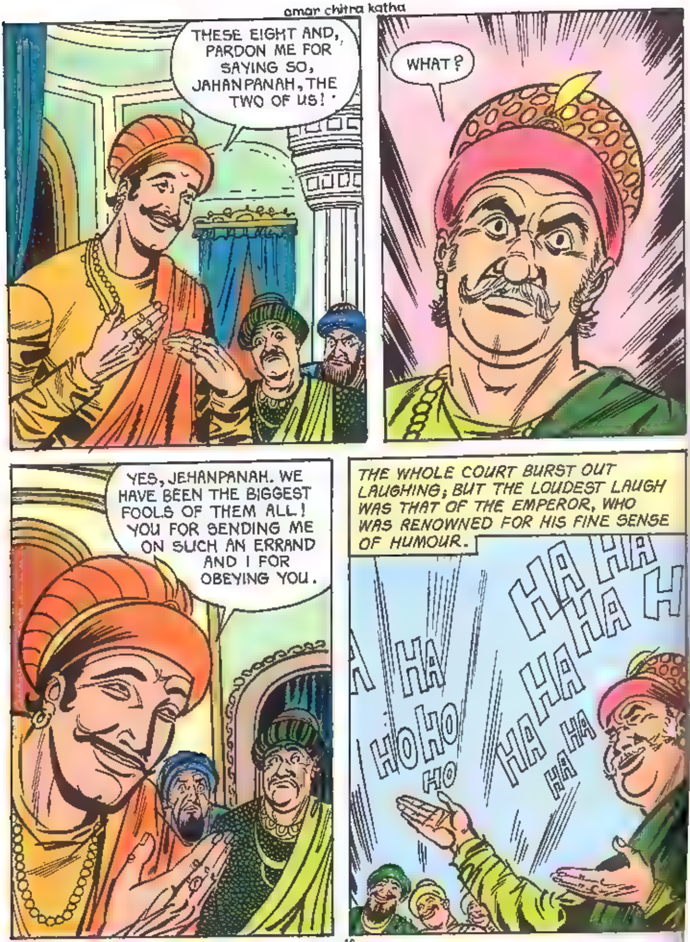

LET US HELP HIM, HUZUR.
OH! YES, CERTAINLY. WHY NOT!


THEY WALKED UP TO THE MAN.
AH! HUZUR! PERHAPS YOU CAN HELP ME.


I HID MY RING FOR SAFE-KEEPING, IN A HOLE IN THIS SAND-PILE, AND NOW I CAN'T FIND IT.
YOU MUST HAVE MARKED THE SPOT, I SUPPOSE.


BUT NATURALLY, HUZUR! I AM NOT SUCH A FOOL. THERE WAS A CLOUD RIGHT ABOVE THE SPOT WHERE I HID THE RING.
NOW THE TREACHEROUS CLOUD HAS GONE AND SO HAS MY RING!
HE'S RIGHT, HUZUR! HOW WAS HE TO KNOW THAT THE CLOUD WOULD BETRAY HIM SO CRUELLY?
NEVER MIND THE CLOUD. COME WITH ME. WE WILL REPLACE YOUR RING.
YOU DON'T MEAN IT, HUZUR!
HE DOES! HE IS THE KINDEST MAN I'VE EVER MET.


BACK AT HIS PALACE—
THERE! I HAVE EIGHT OF THEM! FOR THE NINTH AND THE TENTH... WELL!
THE NEXT MORNING, BIRBAL ENTERED THE COURT WITH THE FOOLS.
WHAT! BACK SO SOON, BIRBAL?
IT'S NOT SURPRISING, JAHANPANAH. EVERYONE KNOWS THAT FOOLS ARE EASIER FOUND THAN WISE MEN.
AND BIRBAL TOLD THE EMPEROR ABOUT HIS ENCOUNTER WITH EACH OF THEM.
BUT THERE ARE ONLY EIGHT FOOLS HERE! I DISTINCTLY REMEMBER ASKING YOU TO SHOW ME TEN.
I BEG TO CORRECT YOU, JAHANPANAH. THERE **ARE** TEN.


THESE EIGHT AND, PARDON ME FOR SAYING SO, JAHANPANAH, THE TWO OF US!
WHAT?
YES, JEHANPANAH. WE HAVE BEEN THE BIGGEST FOOLS OF THEM ALL! YOU FOR SENDING ME ON SUCH AN ERRAND AND I FOR OBEYING YOU.
THE WHOLE COURT BURST OUT LAUGHING; BUT THE LOUDEST LAUGH WAS THAT OF THE EMPEROR, WHO WAS RENOWNED FOR HIS FINE SENSE OF HUMOUR.

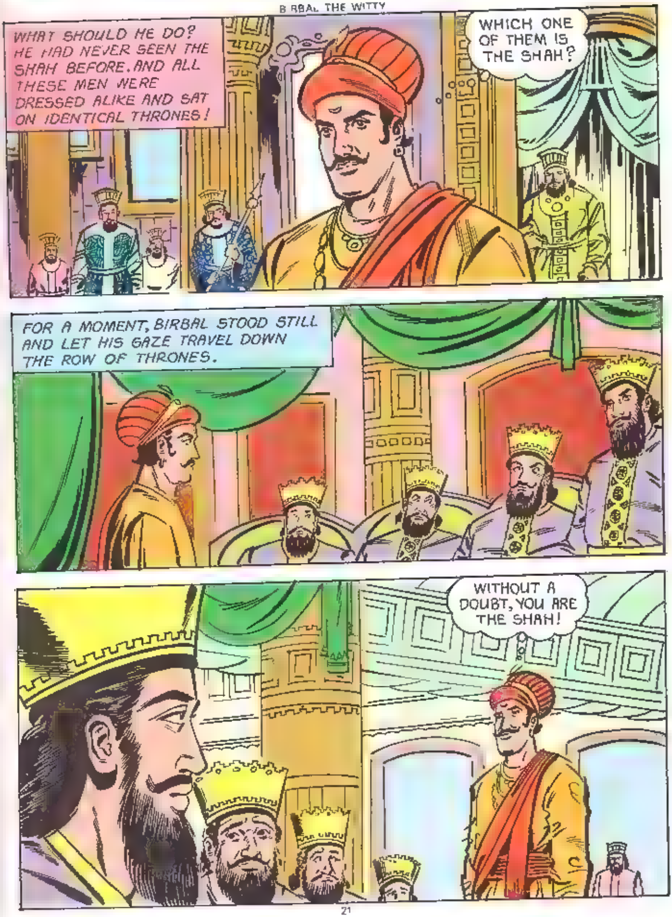

THE CROWS OF AGRA
ONE DAY, AKBAR'S COURTIERS CAME TO HIM WITH A COMPLAINT.
JAHANPANAH, WHY DO YOU ALWAYS TURN TO BIRBAL WHEN YOU HAVE A PROBLEM?
BECAUSE HE HAS AN ANSWER FOR EVERYTHING - A SOLUTION FOR EVERY PROBLEM.
SO DO WE. BUT YOU NEVER GIVE US A CHANCE.
AH! HERE COMES BIRBAL. ALL RIGHT, TODAY I WILL GIVE ALL OF YOU A CHANCE.


AS SOON AS BIRBAL JOINED THEM, AKBAR LOOKED UP INTO THE SKY.
I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW HOW MANY CROWS WE HAVE IN AGRA.
THE COURTIERS LOOKED AT ONE ANOTHER IN DISMAY.
HOW ARE WE TO KNOW ?
IT WOULD TAKE US YEARS TO FIND OUT.
IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO COUNT THEM, JAHANPANAH! THEY DON'T STAY IN ONE PLACE.
NOBODY CAN ANSWER THAT QUESTION, JAHANPANAH. NOT EVEN BIRBAL!
AKBAR LOOKED AT BIRBAL.
THERE ARE THIRTY-THREE THOUSAND, NINE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-ONE, TO BE EXACT.
HIS PROMPT, CONFIDENT ANSWER AMAZED EVEN THE EMPEROR.
BIRBAL! HOW CAN YOU BE SO SURE? YOU WILL BE SEVERELY PUNISHED IF YOU ARE WRONG.
I AM CONFIDENT THAT I AM RIGHT, JAHANPANAH.


WHAT IF THERE ARE MORE CROWS THAN YOU CLAIM?
THOSE WOULD BE THE CROWS WHO HAVE COME FROM OTHER PARTS TO VISIT THEIR FRIENDS AND RELATIVES IN AGRA. NATURALLY, I CAN'T INCLUDE THEM. FOR THEY WILL SOON GO AWAY.
AND SUPPOSE THERE ARE FEWER THAN YOU CLAIM?
OH, THAT! IT'S SIMPLE. MANY OF OUR CROWS HAVE GONE TO VISIT THEIR FRIENDS AND RELATIVES IN OTHER PARTS. NATURALLY, I HAVE NOT INCLUDED THEM IN MY COUNTING!
AS THE COURTIERS SULKED IN SULLEN SILENCE, AKBAR ADDRESSED THEM TRIUMPHANTLY.
THAT'S WHY I SAY, BIRBAL HAS AN ANSWER FOR EVERYTHING! NOW DO YOU AGREE?

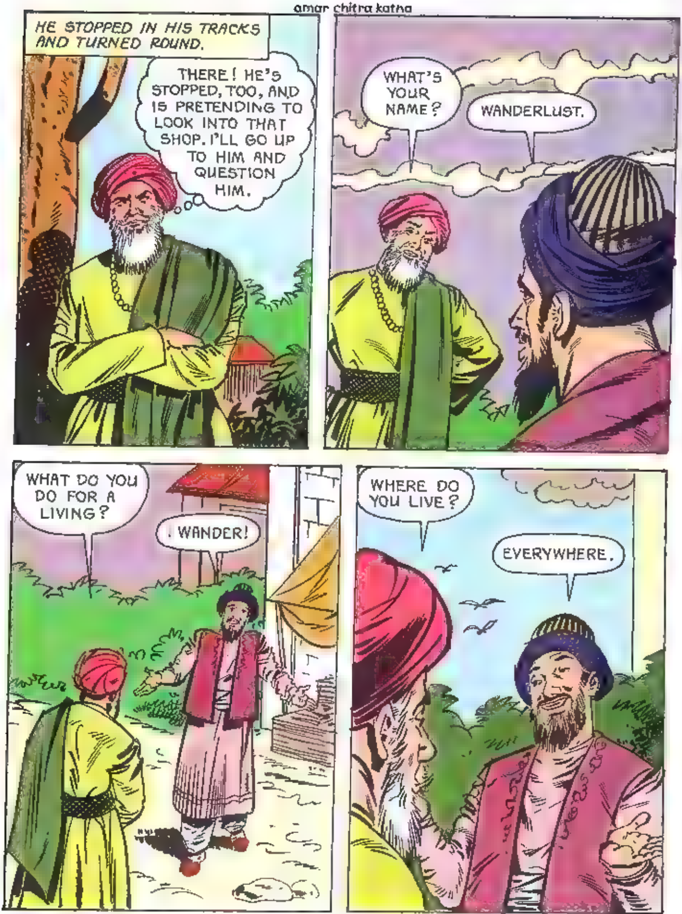
BIRBAL AND THE SHAH OF PERSIA




WHAT SHOULD HE DO? HE HAD NEVER SEEN THE SHAH BEFORE. AND ALL THESE MEN WERE DRESSED ALIKE AND SAT ON IDENTICAL THRONES!
WHICH ONE OF THEM IS THE SHAH?
FOR A MOMENT, BIRBAL STOOD STILL AND LET HIS GAZE TRAVEL DOWN THE ROW OF THRONES.
WITHOUT A DOUBT, YOU ARE THE SHAH!

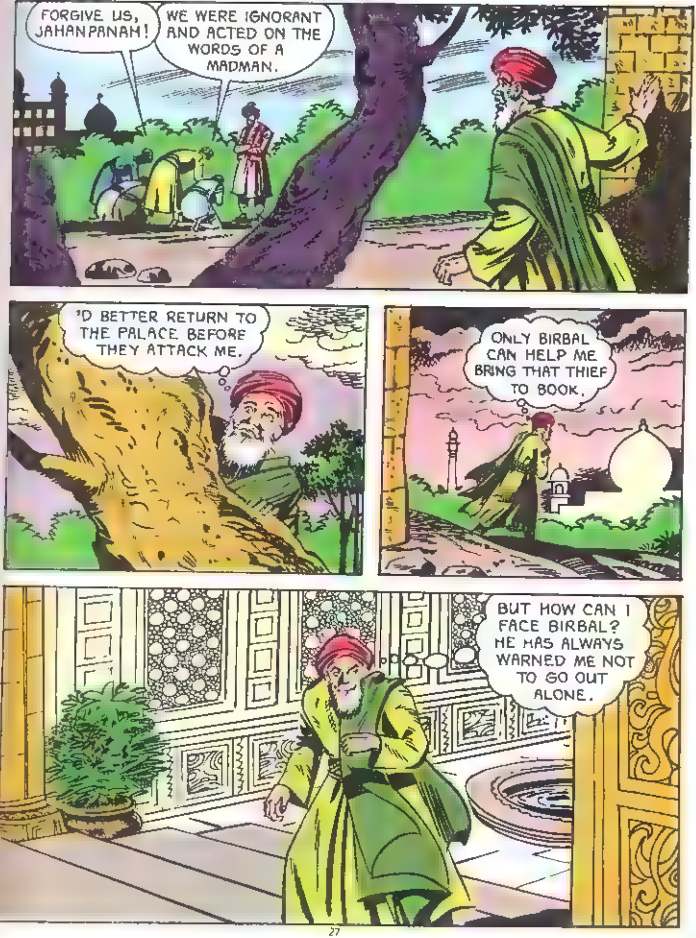

OUR EMPEROR SENDS YOUR HIGHNESS HIS REGARDS. HE HAS SENT ME WITH GIFTS WHICH ARE ON THEIR WAY TO THE TREASURY.
THE SHAH WAS AMAZED.
BIRBAL ! HOW DID YOU RECOGNIZE ME! YOU'VE NEVER SEEN ME BEFORE!
IT WAS SIMPLE, YOUR HIGHNESS. AS I STOOD PERPLEXED, ALL THE OTHERS TURNED TO LOOK AT YOU TO SEE YOUR REACTION; WHILE YOU LOOKED STRAIGHT AHEAD.
THE SHAH MARVELLED AT BIRBAL'S KEEN SENSE OF OBSERVATION.
YOU ARE INDEED THE CLEVEREST PERSON I HAVE EVER MET!
YOU SHALL HENCEFORTH BE CALLED THE OCEAN OF INTELLIGENCE.
AND BEFORE BIRBAL LEFT FOR HINDUSTAN, THE SHAH GAVE HIM ALL THE RICHES HE COULD CARRY WITH HIM.

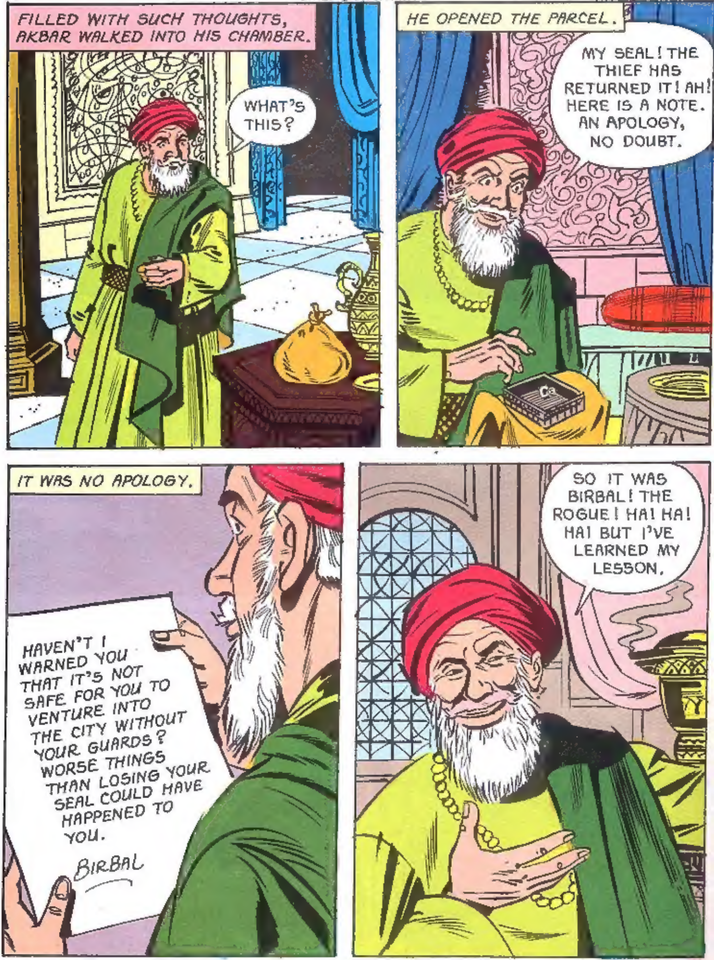

THE SEAL
AKBAR HAD THE HABIT OF DISGUISING HIMSELF AND WANDERING ABOUT IN THE CITY — A HABIT BIRBAL DIDN'T APPROVE OF, AS HE THOUGHT IT UNSAFE.
ALL RIGHT, BIRBAL, I'M OFF.
I STILL SAY YOU OUGHT TO GIVE UP THIS HABIT, JAHANPANAH. AN EMPEROR'S LIFE IS PRECIOUS AND MUST BE WELL PROTECTED.
LATER, AS AKBAR WALKED DOWN THE STREET—
I THINK I'M BEING FOLLOWED.


HE STOPPED IN HIS TRACKS AND TURNED ROUND.
THERE! HE'S STOPPED, TOO, AND IS PRETENDING TO LOOK INTO THAT SHOP. I'LL GO UP TO HIM AND QUESTION HIM.
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
WANDERLUST.
WHAT DO YOU DO FOR A LIVING?
I WANDER!
WHERE DO YOU LIVE?
EVERYWHERE.

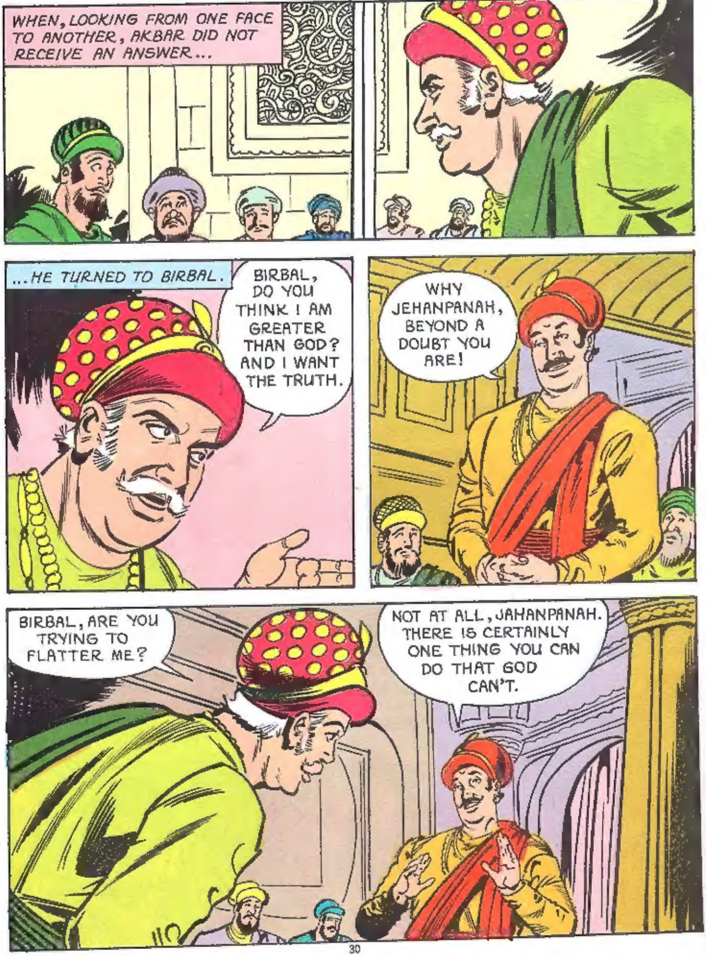

SO IRRITATED WAS AKBAR BY THESE ANSWERS THAT HE FORGOT HIMSELF.
DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?
A HUMAN BEING LIKE ANY OTHER!
I AM THE EMPEROR. HERE IS MY SEAL, IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME.
LET ME SEE IT.
THE STRANGER SLIPPED THE RING INTO HIS CUMMERBAND.


ONLY WHEN THE STRANGER BEGAN TO RUN AWAY DID AKBAR REALISE WHAT HE HAD DONE.
THIEF! THIEF! CATCH HIM! CATCH HIM!
A CROWD RAN AFTER THE THIEF.
DON'T LET HIM ESCAPE.
WHEN THEY CAUGHT UP WITH THE MAN–
FOOLS, DON'T YOU KNOW ME? I'M THE EMPEROR.
THIS SHOULD CONVINCE YOU, IF MY WORDS DON'T!


FORGIVE US, JAHANPANAH!
WE WERE IGNORANT AND ACTED ON THE WORDS OF A MADMAN.
'D BETTER RETURN TO THE PALACE BEFORE THEY ATTACK ME.
ONLY BIRBAL CAN HELP ME BRING THAT THIEF TO BOOK.
BUT HOW CAN I FACE BIRBAL? HE HAS ALWAYS WARNED ME NOT TO GO OUT ALONE.


FILLED WITH SUCH THOUGHTS, AKBAR WALKED INTO HIS CHAMBER.
WHAT'S THIS?
HE OPENED THE PARCEL.
MY SEAL! THE THIEF HAS RETURNED IT! AH! HERE IS A NOTE. AN APOLOGY, NO DOUBT.
IT WAS NO APOLOGY.
HAVEN'T I WARNED YOU THAT IT'S NOT SAFE FOR YOU TO VENTURE INTO THE CITY WITHOUT YOUR GUARDS? WORSE THINGS THAN LOSING YOUR SEAL COULD HAVE HAPPENED TO YOU.
BIRBAL
SO IT WAS BIRBAL! THE ROGUE! HA! HA! HA! BUT I'VE LEARNED MY LESSON.


AKBAR THE GREAT
ONE DAY, IN OPEN COURT, AKBAR WAS TOLD BY A SYCO-PHANT THAT HE WAS GREATER EVEN THAN THE LORD OF THE UNIVERSE.
AKBAR THOUGHT ABOUT IT FOR DAYS.
IN WHAT WAY COULD I BE GREATER THAN GOD?
UNABLE TO ANSWER THE QUESTION FOR HIMSELF, HE SET IT TO HIS COURTIERS.
DO YOU THINK I AM GREATER THAN GOD? IF SO, IN WHAT WAY?
WHAT SHALL I SAY?
WHY DIDN'T HE ASK THE MAN WHO SAID IT?
HOW CAN I ANSWER THAT QUESTION WITHOUT EITHER DISPLEASING THE EMPEROR OR TELLING AN UNTRUTH?


WHEN, LOOKING FROM ONE FACE TO ANOTHER, AKBAR DID NOT RECEIVE AN ANSWER...
...HE TURNED TO BIRBAL.
BIRBAL, DO YOU THINK I AM GREATER THAN GOD? AND I WANT THE TRUTH.
WHY JEHANPANAH, BEYOND A DOUBT YOU ARE!
BIRBAL, ARE YOU TRYING TO FLATTER ME?
NOT AT ALL, JAHANPANAH. THERE IS CERTAINLY ONE THING YOU CAN DO THAT GOD CAN'T.


IF YOU WANT TO BANISH A MAN ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS SEND HIM OUT OF YOUR KINGDOM.
BUT IF THE LORD OF THE UNIVERSE WANTS TO BANISH A MAN WHERE CAN HE SEND HIM?
HAVE I PROVED MY POINT, JAHANPANAH?
AKBAR SMILED.
YOU CERTAINLY HAVE, BIRBAL. AND THANK YOU FOR OPENING MY EYES SO CLEVERLY AND SO TACTFULLY.